Statement of Dan Glickman, Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
Before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the Administration's Clean Water Action Plan. Thank you Chairman Chafee and Senator Baucus for your continued attention to the important issue of the health of our nation's water.

I am pleased to be here along with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Carol Browner. I am also accompanied by Under Secretary Jim Lyons, who represented me as co-chairman of the President's Clean Water Action Plan team.

Both the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and EPA share a common mission helping individuals and communities restore and protect the nations water resources. The Clean Water Action Plan, that President Clinton and Vice President Gore released in February, 1998, provides a blueprint for how USDA, EPA, the Department of Interior, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Defense, and other federal, state, and local partners will work together to continue the progress in water quality improvement we have made over the last quarter century.

USDA has a unique role protecting quality and quantity of water resources in the United States. The Forest Service's management of public forestlands play a critical role determining the quality and quantity of waters that flow from the headwaters of most of the major river systems in the West. In addition, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in concert with local soil and water conservation districts, helps to guide

the stewardship of private farm, forest, and ranch lands downstream from these headwaters, to ensure that the quality of the nation's waters are not impaired. Together, the Forest Service and the NRCS are also working in urban and suburban areas to reduce storm water runoff and sedimentation through urban and community forestry and conservation programs.

Background

The Clean Water Action Plan was developed through a cooperative budget planning effort. It sets strong goals and identifies the tools and resources to protect public health and restore our nation's precious surface and ground waters. It is a broad plan that utilizes existing programs and funding, as well as potential new investments to address problems in our watersheds. Significantly, the plan emphasizes collaborative strategies built around watersheds and the communities they sustain -- a new component the President and Vice President have brought to the federal strategy to revitalize our water resources.

Agriculture plays an important role in protecting and enhancing our environmental quality of life. Sound environmental practices, such as conservation buffers, conservation tillage, forest management, and integrated pest management, help improve water quality, soil health, and wildlife habitat, keeping our agricultural and forestlands economically sustainable and our farmers, ranchers, and foresters globally competitive.

In addition, we made a concerted effort to involve the public in developing the plan. For example, in putting together the Unified National Strategy for Animal Feeding Operations, USDA and EPA co-sponsored 11 national listening sessions to discuss the draft strategy and, more importantly, to receive the public's comments. Many of these sessions were co-chaired by USDA Deputy Secretary Rich Rominger and

Under Secretary Jim Lyons. We also managed a hotline for the public to receive clarification about the draft strategy. Together, these efforts generated about 1,800 written comments from the public, in addition to the 300 oral comments at the listening sessions.

USDA's Clean Water Action Plan Activities

The Clean Water Action Plan sets ambitious goals for improving the quality of water resources, and the Department of Agriculture will play a key role in achieving them. In addition to the Forest Service's present investment to improve watershed health on the national forests, the Fiscal Year 2000 budget request includes funds to accelerate the maintenance of needed national forest roads and the obliteration of roads no longer essential for rural commerce or administrative or recreational access. The Forest Service will be central to developing a unified federal policy for managing watersheds administered by all federal land management agencies; a draft of this policy is currently being prepared for publication in the Federal Register for public comment. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers, and rural communities on water quality and quantity issues and also has a leading role implementing the plan. Through its field structure, NRCS works directly with the land owners and provides technical assistance through its Small Watersheds Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Resource Conservation and Development Program, all of which play an important role in improving and maintaining water quality.

Also, USDA has enrolled over 30 million acres in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), which idles agricultural land for 10 to 15 year periods. The resulting grassland or woodland filter runoff water and create valuable wildlife habitat, among other amenities. A new feature USDA has added to the CRP is the Conservation Reserve

Enhancement Program (CREP), which establishes a federal-state partnership to encourage farmers and ranchers to remove sensitive lands from agricultural use. In Oregon and Washington, for example, CREP funds will be used to protect streamside buffers critical to water quality and salmon restoration. In Maryland, the CREP will enroll lands essential to efforts to restore the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay. In total, there are 7 CREP programs in place, and several others under development.

Mr. Chairman, I want to emphasize two key elements of the USDA role in improving the nation's waters through implementation of the Clean Water Action Plan. First, as it applies to private lands, the Clean Water Action Plan emphasizes voluntary approaches to solving problems, a key component of the strategy USDA has used since the Dust Bowl era of the 1930's, to assist farmers and ranchers in conserving our natural resources.

Second, the Department's natural resource conservation and environmental protection activities will continue to involve the public through locally led conservation, involving people at the local level to identify various private, local, state, and federal programs and funding sources that would help them best to meet goals.

For example, the community of Squaw and Baldwin Creeks, Wyoming, exemplifies the meaning of locally led conservation. The Squaw and Baldwin Creeks contributed significant amounts of silt and nutrients to the Popo Agie River, primarily due to the subdivision of large grazing areas into small ranchettes. The resulting concentration of livestock caused the stream banks to become badly eroded, and storage capacity of a reservoir was greatly reduced by sedimentation and trout habitat degraded. Using the locally led conservation approach, the Squaw and Baldwin Creeks Watershed Rehabilitation project began in 1990, installing erosion and sediment control conservation practices, restoring stream riparian habitat, and improving grazing practices. They have

improved the irrigation and fishery capabilities in the watershed, and the restored natural, meandering pattern of the creeks.

These efforts have focused community involvement and education. People who were at first skeptical of the project joined the effort when they saw the water getting clearer, demonstrating how voluntary efforts of local people, who know and understand the natural resource needs of their community and watersheds, can address their local needs and concerns. We believe we can apply these experiences nationwide to achieve the goals contained in the Clean Water Action Plan.

In addition to technical and financial assistance for farmers and ranchers, we also need to make further investments in research and development. The Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension system, coordinated by the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) along with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) have been active for many years in research and development that apply to water quality improvement and protection. ARS recently held a nationwide conference to assess current research work being done by the agency on animal feeding operations, to improve coordination among research efforts, and to plan future activities. Fourteen land grant universities have formed a nationwide research and extension consortium to focus on animal manure management issues. Most state extension programs have developed handbooks, training material, and offer training on water quality, manure, and nutrient management for agricultural producers.

Conclusion

As Secretary, I believe that a healthy and sustainable American landscape, to which an abundant supply of clean water is critical, is one of the most important legacies we can leave to future generations. Through our efforts to implement the Clean Water

Action Plan, I firmly believe we will continue the progress made during the past quarter-century. I look forward to working with you and the Congress to protect the nation's waters and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the environmental leadership you have provided during your many years of public service.

I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.